

## **Afghan Refugees in Pakistan**

**September 1982**

**Background:** Refugees began to flee Afghanistan in the summer of 1978, soon after the Marxist regime came to power. Although the first refugees were predominantly the affluent, widespread political repression and religious persecution caused more and more peasants and urban workers to flee their country. The Soviet invasion in December 1979 increased the flow even further. Pakistan, which borders Afghanistan, became the principal country of first asylum.

**Current situation:** Today, one in every five Afghans is a refugee. In February 1982, the Pakistan Government estimated the Afghan refugee population--the world's largest--at 2.6 million; 2.1 million live in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and 500,000 in Baluchistan Province. New arrivals continue, although at a lower rate than in the past several years. There are more than 275 tent villages in Pakistan.

The Pakistan Government has extended an impressive welcome, despite the risk of internal destabilization inherent in a decision to grant refuge to 2.6 million Afghans. The arrangement between Pakistan and the concerned donor nations has been that Pakistan authorities will deliver life-sustaining assistance to the Afghan refugees, while the international community will help finance such assistance. Toward this end, the Pakistan Government's Refugee Administration was created to implement programs under the management of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Pakistan places few restrictions on the refugees living within their borders, allowing them to travel freely, hold jobs, and establish businesses.

The impact of the refugees on Pakistan and its citizens has caused concern. However, incidents of violence have been few and isolated. In the NWFP, the strong cultural and political ties between the Pakistanis and the refugees have reduced the potential for conflict. The increasing numbers of refugees and their herds of livestock have damaged the environment and diminished water and land resources. Refugees are sometimes blamed for rising prices and the depression of local wage scales. Inland transportation of relief supplies burdens Pakistan's rail and truck lines in the NWFP and contributes to a monetary strain as well. Some dissatisfaction is inevitable, since such a rapid increase in population, particularly in an underdeveloped nation, tests the effectiveness of all governmental capacities and threatens the country's welfare. Chances of voluntary repatriation without a political solution, however, are slim. Although the Afghan Government has officially offered amnesty for those returning home, conditions there remain unchanged and the refugees largely have ignored the offer.

**UN initiative:** The UNHCR has managed the refugee relief program since 1980. It oversees health programs, water projects, veterinary care, and procurement and distribution of relief commodities such as tents,

clothing, stoves, and blankets. The Pakistan Government's Refugee Administration is UNHCR's operational partner in these programs.

Although UNHCR is involved mainly in relief programs for these refugees, it also provides legal protection and resettlement assistance. In 1982, \$71,156,500 was allotted from UNHCR's budget for the Afghan refugee relief program.

UNHCR also works closely with the World Food Program (WFP), which is responsible for determining the food needs of refugees and procuring commodities from donor nations to meet those needs. WFP also monitors the delivery of food from the port at Karachi to the refugees. In 1980, a joint UNHCR/WFP appeal for Afghan relief received contributions of almost \$100 million, including \$47 million for food.

International and voluntary agencies: Twenty-eight international and voluntary agencies (outside the UN) are involved in procuring relief supplies for refugees and managing health care operations of refugee camps in districts to which they are assigned by the Pakistan Government. These organizations include the International Rescue Committee, the Catholic Relief Service, Church World Service, the Salvation Army, Pakistan's Red Crescent Society, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The ICRC medical program treats Afghan soldiers and civilian victims with war-related injuries. The assistance provided by these organizations is supplementary to the UNHCR role and is essential to an effective relief operation. Studies have determined the general health of Afghan refugees in Pakistan to be better than would be expected given the conditions of the camps, primarily as a result of the work of the voluntary agencies and the ICRC. In 1980, these 28 international and voluntary agencies contributed \$18 million in goods and services to aid the Afghan refugees.

US initiative: The US has made general contributions to the various relief efforts for the Afghan refugees. In addition to a 1981 bilateral grant of \$8 million to defray the cost of inland transportation of relief commodities, the US also contributed more than \$5 million to international and voluntary agencies and \$45 million in food to the WFP. The US pledges annually about one-third of the UNHCR Pakistan allotment. In 1981 the contribution was \$32.6 million and for 1982 the pledge was \$24.15 million. Since the Soviet invasion, U.S. contributions have totaled more than \$217 million.